

Building codes are integral to the safety of individuals and the community. In the Code of Virginia, the law explicitly outlines the purpose of the building codes when it states, “The provisions of the Building Code and modifications thereof shall be such as to protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents of the Commonwealth” (“Title 36. Housing”). Clearly, the purpose of building codes is to serve as a safety and preventative measure to protect citizens. I’ve seen the detrimental repercussions of the absence of building codes and experienced the benefits of effective building codes.

When I lived in Indonesia, I was a denizen of buildings that lacked building codes. At the school I attended, Jakarta Intercultural School, each classroom was its own building. From the outside, the buildings looked structurally stable. But internally, they were anything but. One day during class, a feral cat broke through the ceiling, and plaster, stone, and ceiling fragments came crashing down into the classroom. The level of destruction caused by such a small animal spoke more to the weakness of the structure. The class was quickly evacuated out of the room and luckily no one was hurt. Later investigation into the incident revealed that the ceiling was weak due to shortcuts made when the building was constructed. Furthermore, in the hurry to finish the buildings, gaps were left open that were large enough for small animals, like a feral cat to crawl into. Because there were no regulations or building codes or inspectors, there was no prevention. This experience encapsulates the dangers of not having a building code.

Now living in Virginia, I attend school with stringent building codes. Virginia’s public schools are required to adhere to requirements in regards to occupancy capacity, structural requirements, handicap accessibility, framing requirements, fire codes, and safety design (“Guidelines for School Facilities In Virginia’s Public Schools”). While in this school system, I have never witnessed a structural malfunction thanks to the building codes and maintenance upkeep. As a result of the building codes, only 3% of public schools with

permanent buildings in the United States were in poor condition in 2012-2013 school year (Alexander et al.). Because of building codes, the educational community is enriched by learning in a stable and safe environment.

I have seen the benefits of building codes during the construction of my family's new house. I watched my house grow from its wooden skeletal outlines to a bland bare building to a fully furnished home. During this time, I was exposed to the regulations and policies that went hand-in-hand with the construction. While the whole process seemed like a hassle at the time, I am grateful for the building codes that ensured my house would be safe. For example, a building inspector decided that the flu chimney needed to be rebuilt to have two separate flues instead of one flu shared between our furnace and gas fireplace. This delayed our building finish date by two weeks. However, we can with confidence use the furnace and the gas fireplace without being concerned about safety issues. Three years later, we are happy in our home and haven't experienced any structural issues.

Building codes affects everyone individually and in the community. According to the National Human Activity Pattern Survey in 1994, Americans spend 87% of their time in enclosed buildings (Klepeis, N E, et al.). So by extrapolation, our lives are affected by building codes 87% of the time. I am grateful for building codes for striving to maintain a safe setting for myself and those in my community.

Works Cited

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